



Photo: ARLENE CHEW

## A home awash in light

Surrounded by mature trees, this house in Kuching embraces its natural surroundings while embodying a permeable design.

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THE general idea was to keep things simple, and be respectful of nature. The result: an open and “breathable” design built around existing acacia trees.

KerANJI House, named after the lane it is situated on, is located in a dense housing area in Kuching, Sarawak. The original 1,114sq m

plot of land came with five large acacia trees – one in front, two in the middle and two at the back.

“The intention to keep all the trees was very clear from the start. Integrating the trees became pivotal to the planning of the house. The building ended up wrapping around the two trees in the centre, naturally forming a central courtyard,” explained architect Arlene Chew, from

Kuching-based SML Architects.

“We believe existing trees contribute greatly towards the character and spirit of a place, and that co-existing with the land’s ‘original residents’ is always important when designing. It is very important for me, personally, to keep existing trees. We would always pursue to keep as many trees as possible in our projects unless there are valid reasons not to,” she said.

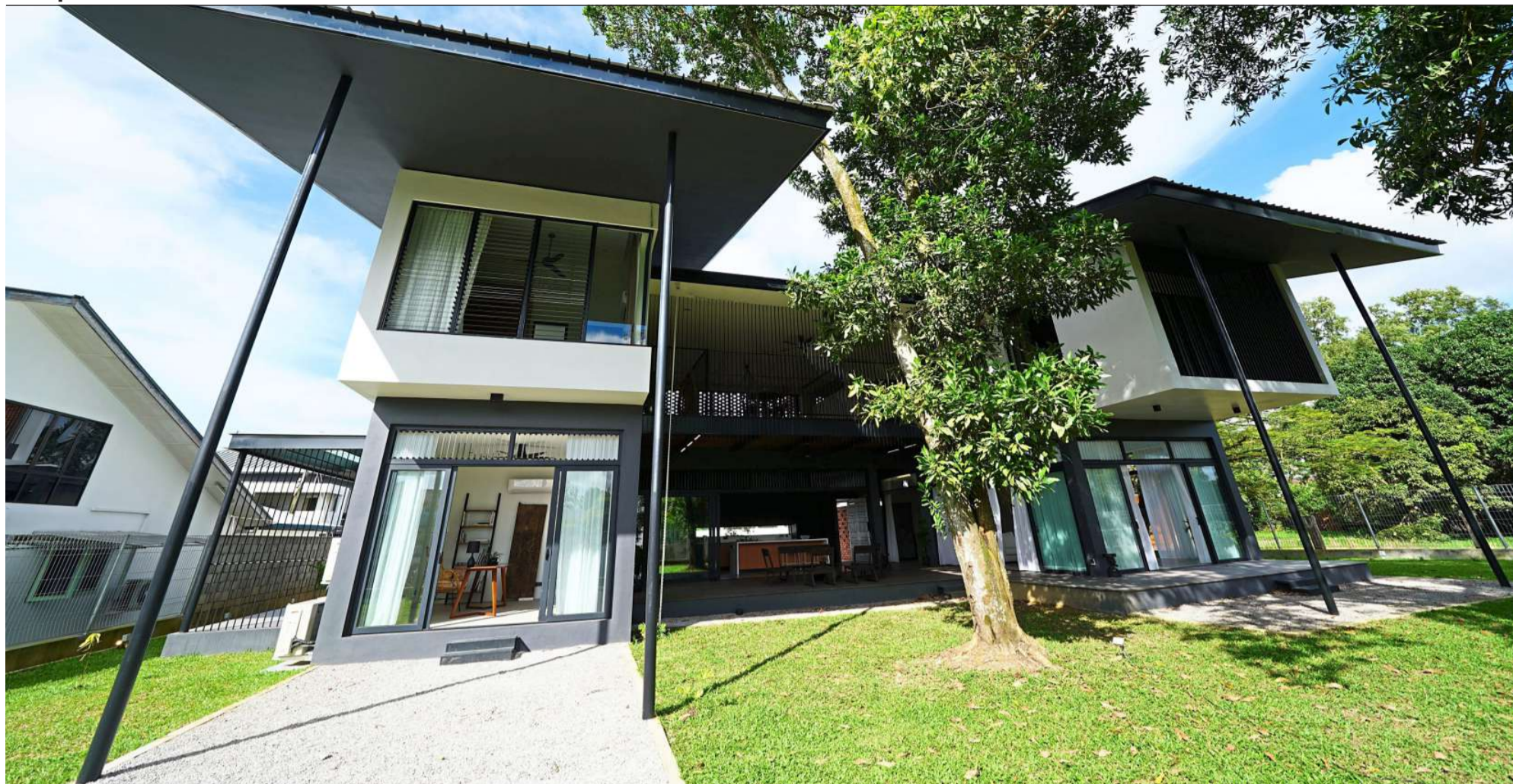
The acacia at the front, unfortunately, did not survive due to termite problems. To make up for that, the owners planted a large Flame of the Forest in its place.

The couple, who hails from Kuala Lumpur and has two grown up children, bought the piece of land because they loved the mature trees in its midst as well as the presence of a small river nearby.

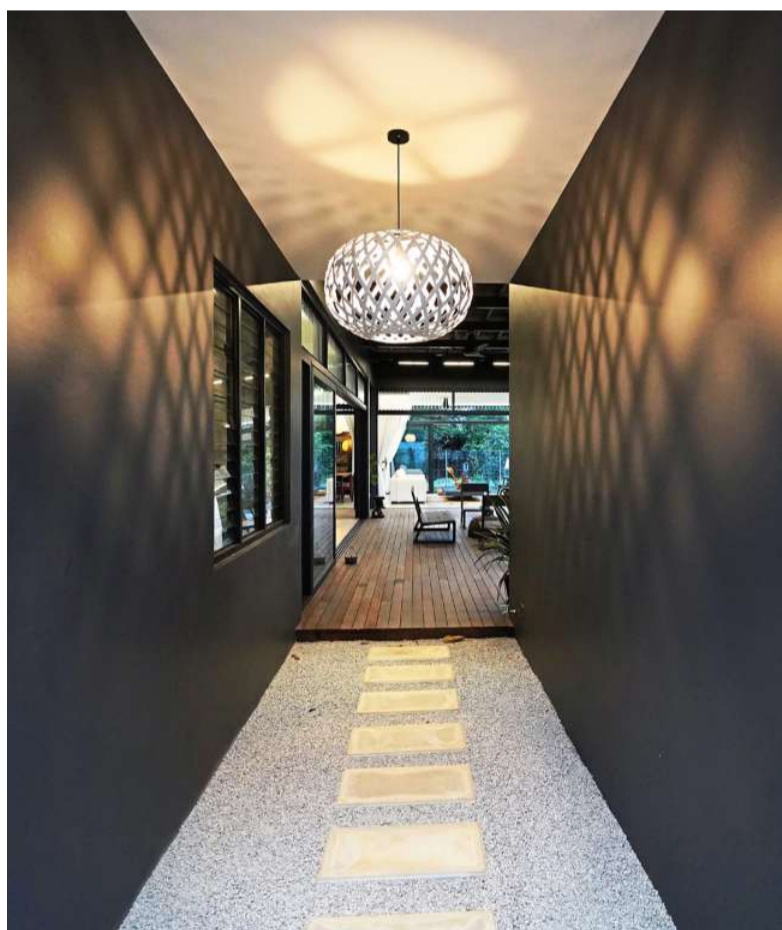
“We were asked to design a small house that would capture the essence of the site and be a home where they could really connect with the lush surroundings. It was to be their future home when they moved to Kuching, a retreat and haven for them and their extended family of rescued cats and dogs.

> TURN TO PAGE 2





The rear part of Keranji House opens out to the gardens beyond. — Photos: ARLENE CHEW



The walkway leading to the central terrace, one of two links that constantly draw air into the space beyond, creating a wind tunnel effect.

## In sync with nature

> FROM PAGE 1

“The family also has a strong appreciation for what was natural, honest and embraced the idea of living openly,” said Chew, adding that the design process was very enjoyable for her as the client was open to non-conventional ideas and was on a similar wavelength.

“The design approach was naturally inspired by the unique site conditions as well as a desire to explore the idea of a very open and permeable way of living, something that reflected both the client’s and our own ideals of what living in the tropics should be like.”

Keranji House essentially con-

sists of two pavilions erected around the trees. Airy links characterised by shaded terraces, open walkways and galleries on all levels connect the pavilions. These shared spaces are where the family members and their friends spend time to socialise, rest, relax and dine.

“At the heart of the house is a double-volume kitchen with a ‘floating’ staircase, flanked by open decks on two floors. All are welcomed here, including the natural elements of rain, wind or sun.”

Chew said the owners emphasised from the start that they wanted minimal air-conditioning and enjoyed living spaces that allowed them to move freely inside and outside.

“Connection with the garden and the natural elements was essential,” said Chew.

The north-south facing design also promotes natural ventilation, with deep roof overhangs over the pavilions and generous terraces around the living spaces providing effective shade from the sun.

Louvres are seen in abundance,



The central terrace linking the two pavilions is a great place to unwind and relax.



Proto-habitat is a flexible eco-friendly house, easily dismantled in five days. — AFP Relaxnews

## Rise of mobile and modular houses

IMAGINE an expandable house, to which you could easily add an extra room, or even several ones. No need to turn your office space into a nursery. It would be quite a good way to avoid the stress of moving, especially if the building was eco-friendly.

Does it sound like a concept out of the distant future? Not as much as you might think, since these types of new nomadic dwellings are seeing the light of day in France and worldwide.

At the beginning of 2020, as the first lockdown measures were being implemented in France, two French architects, Flavien Menu

and Frederique Barchelard, came up with their “proto-habitat” – a flexible eco-friendly house, easily dismantled in five days.

Their life-size prototype, currently visible in Bordeaux Jardin Public (in the southwest of France), covers a 30sq m surface on the ground level, with a 15sq m mezzanine and a 30sq m winter garden. You can also add “dismantling modules” if you need extra space.

Barchelard explained to ETX Studio that with this approach, they wanted to “develop individual or collective housing that focuses on green and sustainable mate-

rial while being economically affordable”.

The two French architects, who both spent a few years in London, want to invite reflection on our current way of life. They also designed a range of folding and transportable furniture aiming at the “new nomadic generation”, people who tend to move every three years.

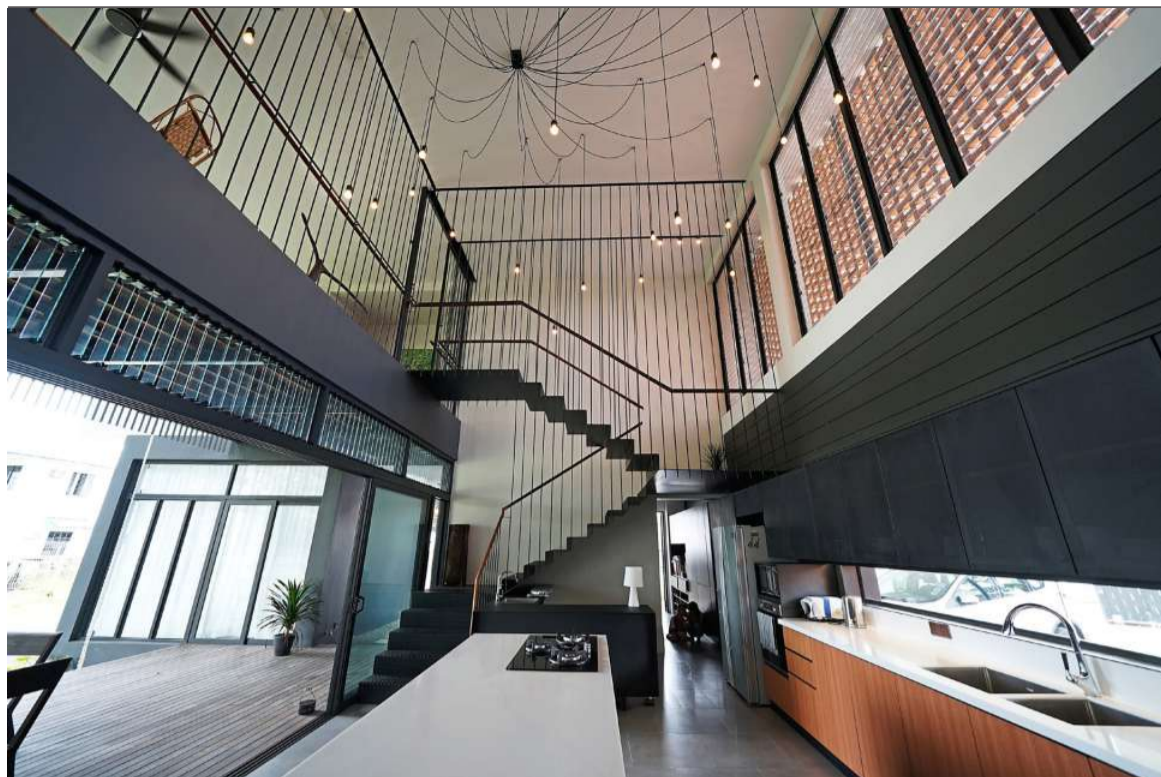
Three years earlier, architect Julien Menard and designer Anseau Delassalle presented Novablock, a modular building made of assembling wood blocks (from 21.6sq m) to accommodate inhabitants’ wishes to live in a

loft or a more traditional house.

Innovative mobile dwellings are also attracting interest in other countries. In 2017, British company Ten Fold made waves with a living space that can be completely folded up in a few minutes.

This offbeat type of portable house can be transported on a truck. The units are self-deploying; they can fold up or unfold with the mere click of a button of a handheld battery-powered drill. Ultra convenient for the new generation of nomads who don’t want to stay in the same place for too long! – AFP Relaxnews





At the heart of the house is a double-volume kitchen with a 'floating' staircase, flanked by open decks on two floors.

placed above glazed windows and behind the permeable laced brick facade, facilitating breeze and constant air movement throughout the entire house.

Two lower entrances connecting the central double-volume space also create a wind tunnel along the terraces, something which the owners love.

Unsurprisingly, there is no air-conditioning in the house except for the bedrooms.

Being avid travellers, the owners also wanted the house to be practical and easily secured when they were away. Therefore, the fully enclosed built-up area measures just around 270sq m, with a similar sized space set aside for covered terraces. All that provides enough living space for the family as well as their three dogs and six cats.

"In addition to the physical permeability of the spaces, the generous terraces on both levels and the vented gallery between the front rooms and the laced brick façade provide plenty of nooks and corners for the animals to rest and play."

The design also maximised the use of materials in their natural states.

"The project was successfully completed with a relatively small budget. We managed this by maximising the use of local materials. This included employing locally produced tiles, red bricks, concrete blocks, timber, stones, etc, which were then expressed in their natural states as much as possible.

"It was about the extraction of value from everyday materials and objects, the appreciation of



Keranji House is designed to allow freedom of movement inside and outside, as well as promote natural ventilation.

materials for their colours, textures and structural characteristics. No extravagance; just materials simply used differently," explained Chew.

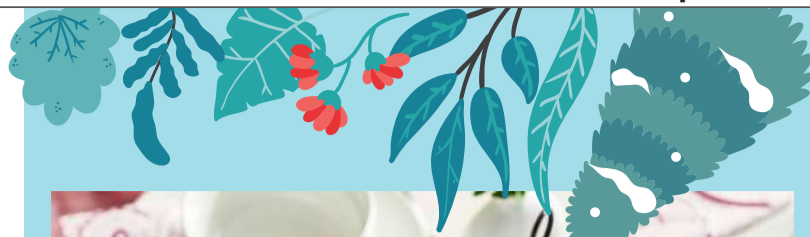
Sourcing the materials locally, added Chew, not only meant keeping costs down, it also helped reduce the level of carbon footprint that the building would have had on the environment.

"The materials were also applied in ways that would make them work extra hard. Everything had a purpose.

Materials were used as sparingly as possible and had to contribute to the overall design intention of living openly and naturally.

"An example is the front laced brick walls that breathe while providing privacy, filtered views and light. Another is the 'floating' minimalistic steel main staircase that transports and delights.

"The way the house is designed also encourages a more sustainable way of living, with very little energy actually used for lighting and cooling," she said.



The Inbringande three-tier serving stand is perfect for small bites. — Photos: Ikea

## Festive offerings

By WONG LI ZA  
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EVEN though this year's festivals and holiday season are celebrated on a smaller scale due to Covid-19, it is still a time to be grateful for what we have and for our loved ones.

As the year draws to an end, Ikea is inviting all Malaysians to embrace and reinvent the festive season.

Whether it is by creating new memories with old traditions, bonding with loved ones over Christmas treats, cooking up a storm, or just enjoying a quiet, cosy day in, make your home a comfortable place.

For those who plan to prepare meals in the kitchen and savour homecooked food, every item in the kitchen and dining room can help to get us into the festive mood.

From the right cooking utensils and dinnerware, to aesthetically pleasing table decorations, it's all about creating the right ambience.

To make your home smell like Christmas – think gingerbread cookies and other sweet treats – check out some of Ikea's must-have bakeware, from springform pans to stainless steel flour sifters.

Get creative as you and your kids decorate a gingerbread house; don't forget to put on the gingerbread-themed apron for the young ones.



Deck your Christmas tree with the Vinter 2020 hanging decorations.

To whip up those traditional savoury Christmas dinner delights, there's a range of kitchen utensils to help you get the ball rolling. Whether you are baking a pie, roasting a chicken or even making some stew, make sure you have all the necessary equipment.

For the finishing touch, deck your Christmas tree with Vinter 2020 red baubles and the gold hanging decoration set.

To find out more, shop online in the comfort of your home with Ikea's contactless delivery and assembly services, or visit any Ikea store near you.

For more Christmas inspiration, visit [IKEA.my/Christmas](https://www.ikea.com/my/Christmas).

## Eco-friendly white paint

THERE'S no denying that climate control systems contribute to global warming. Now, researchers in the United States could have a solution for reducing air-conditioning use, with a new type of paint that reflects sunlight and prevents heat stored.

We already know that a simple coat of white paint can help make homes feel cool. But research is underway to go much further than that, replacing the need for air-cond when the mercury rises with a mere lick of paint.

Engineers at Purdue University in the US have developed a material capable of reducing the ambi-

ent temperature by approximately 7°C. The paint can reflect up to 95.5% of sunlight. In other words, it doesn't store heat, and it could make air-conditioning redundant.

According to their findings, published in the *Cell Reports Physical Science* journal, the engineers studied the properties of around a hundred combinations of materials, narrowing them down to 10 and testing about 50 different formulations for each material. They eventually landed on a formulation made from calcium carbonate, a substance commonly found in rocks and seashells.

The researchers have already

filed a patent application to protect their work, which could find use in homes, as well as cars, factories and more. In addition, this new type of paint doesn't just repel heat from surfaces; it's actually capable of sending it away from Earth and out of the atmosphere, so it can't contribute to global warming. And that makes all the difference compared to other, similar products in the sector.

In 2012, a Nasa study found that white coatings in New York City could drop peak roof temperatures by an average of 24°C. – AFP Relaxnews



Complete your dinner table setting with these Sallskaplig wine glasses.